



Big Cypress Backcountry Trail Marking

[Note: The BICY ORVAC Education and Public Use Subcommittee has reviewed this document. Suggested additions are underscored. Suggested deletions are ~~striked out~~. Notes are added in brackets such as this one.]

Introduction

This plan describes sign and marking standards for backcountry trails maintained and managed by Big Cypress National Preserve. It is meant to bring uniformity to trail marking/signing, make trails easy to identify, and enhance user education, enjoyment and safety on trails.

The marking of backcountry trails will be consistent with guidelines set forth in NPS *Management Policies 2006*, section 6.3.10.4:

“Signs detract from the wilderness character of an area and make the imprint of man and management more noticeable. Only those signs necessary for visitor safety or to protect wilderness resources, such as those identifying routes and distances, will be permitted. Where signs are used, they should be compatible with their surroundings and the minimum size possible.”

[Note: The sub-committee strongly supports the above statement and recommends that it be used consistently to shape the direction of this document.]

Trail markers will be consistent in size, shape, and color and will provide information that is easily understood. Though the ultimate goal of signage in the backcountry is to minimize the amount of signs, the NPS recognizes that as designated trail use only for Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs) is implemented more signs may be needed for a short period of time to ensure travel along designated routes.

It is often thought that marking a trail has one purpose: to indicate the route and reassure users they are on the trail. But, along heavily traveled trail sections, it serves to actually influence travel. In other words, blazes, signs, metal markers, and posts, when thoughtfully placed, can help guide users along the appropriate pathway, particularly in open areas. Markers guide users along a single route, which in turn may prevent off-trail resource damage.

This plan is intended to complement the BICY *Recreational Off-road Vehicle Management Plan* and will be similarly adaptively managed.

Types of Trail Signage and Markers

Access Point Kiosks

Kiosks will be placed at all access points and include the following:

- Access point name and number
- Trail name and number (if there is one)
- NPS and BICY logos
- ORV permitting and operator licensing requirements

- Types of trail uses allowed, i.e., ORV type, hiking, etc.
- Map showing the trail location and trail amenities, if any
- Trail length (in mileage), GPS coordinates of major intersections, amenities and sites of interest

[Note: Subcommittee feels it is ALL of interest.]

- ~~Trail difficulty and special instructions~~

[Note: the sub-committee wonders whether the preserve intends to rank trails in some way, such as black diamond, etc. Our general feeling is that signs about trail difficulty are inappropriate as they take the discovery out of the experience, and tend to be inaccurate as trails are unpredictable and vary with seasons, and can be dangerous if trail users assume there are no dangers except those that are marked. Also, we feel that most special instructions are covered in the mandatory ORV class. We recommend replacing this bullet with a general disclaimer such as that in the next bullet.]

- These are unimproved trails. Trail conditions are unpredictable and vary with the seasons. Caution should be used at all times.

- Rules of the trail, including trail user yielding signs. Appropriate and inappropriate use statement

[Note: Include statement recommended by ORVAC and adopted by BICY.]

- Warnings of dangers, safety messages and trail closures

[Note: the subcommittee interprets this as notice of prescribed burn operations, wildfire alerts, annual 60-day closures, etc.]

- Phone numbers for NPS information and emergency services

The kiosk/bulletin board trailhead sign may also include:

- Hours trailhead is open, if applicable
- Trail maps and handouts

[Note: The subcommittee also recommends downloadable maps on the website, and if technologically feasible downloadable GPS trail maps.]

- Trail register/backcountry permits

[Note: The subcommittee stresses that it is critical that these be available at every access point.]

- Information on trail organization partners and/or trail care crews
- Information on how users can get involved in volunteering
- Information on agency partners
- Interpretive information

Typical prefabricated kiosk for backcountry access points

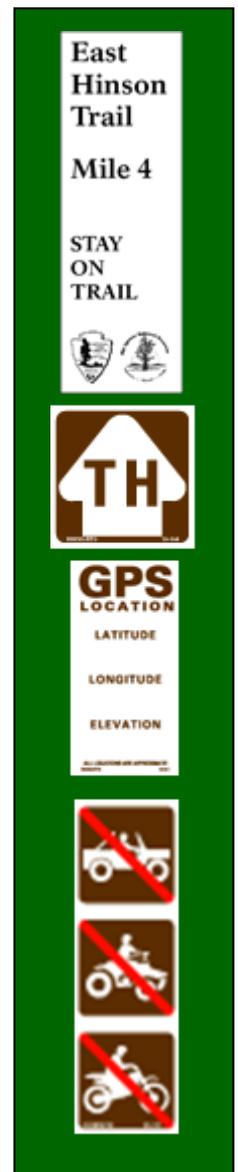


Primary Trail Identifier Markers Will Be:

- Used along primary trail routes.
- Green carsonite flat markers affixed to galvanized steel posts.
 - [Note: The subcommittee feels strongly that the vertical sample shown to the right is appropriate, but that high, horizontal street signs such as those found in residential neighborhoods would be inappropriate.]*
- Of an elevation to be visible and above high water line, but not obtrusive.
- Set approximately every mile along the trail route from the access point or nearest intersection from which the trail begins, as needed if the trail route is unclear or if there are intersections. Decisions to place signs will be site-specific.
- Be on both the left and right side of the trail if needed at specific sites to keep people on the trail, but will be minimized where possible.
- Allow for the application of 3” wide decals depicting
 - Trail name and/or identification number
 - Mile from access point or nearest intersection
 - ~~Arrow indicating direction of trail travel~~
 - Coordinates of site
 - [Note: The subcommittee recommends posting the coordinates only at major intersections and trail junctions unless they are needed from an emergency response standpoint. We request clarification on this point.]*
 - ~~International symbols of appropriate vehicles for trail~~
 - [Note: The subcommittee recommends posting appropriate vehicles for the trail at the trail head, then not posting them on subsequent signs unless something has changed or where crossing a hiking-only trail.]*

Secondary Trail Identifier Markers Will Be:

- Used along secondary trail routes.
- Blue carsonite flat markers set in the ground or affixed to galvanized steel posts.



- Set approximately every mile along the trail route from the nearest intersection from which the trail begins, as needed if the trail route is unclear or if there are intersections. Decisions to place signs will be site-specific.
- Be on the right side of the trail only.
- Allow for the application of 3” wide decals depicting
 - Trail identification number.
 - International symbols of appropriate vehicles for trail.
 - [Note: See above].*
 - ~~○ Arrow indicating direction trail travel.~~
 - The first marker along the trail will also post the approximate total mileage of the trail.

Example of a Primary Trail Identifier Marker, right

Trail Route Markers Will Be:

- Used to identify appropriate route when necessary.
- Will be green along primary routes and blue along secondary routes.
- Will have an arrow identifying the appropriate route only where necessary.
- In wooded areas will be 2” x 6” trail blazes nailed to trees.
[Note: Subcommittee feels nailing signs to trees should be discouraged.]
- In open areas may be affixed to carsonite posts that are either set in the ground or affixed to galvanized steel posts.
- In areas that are receiving major impact, will be used as “channel markers” identifying the allowable lane of travel, and be set perpendicular to each other in close proximity to ensure use stays along allowable route, until such time that the area is stabilized. Once stabilized the marked route will be reduced in width and signage will remain heavy until surrounding vegetation re-grows. Once the trail narrows and vegetation re-grows route markers will be greatly reduced.
- Allowances for discretion in determining the actual spacing and number of markers needed to ensure travel along the designated trail.

Trail End Markers Will Be:

- Placed at the terminus of either a primary or secondary trail.
- Have a clear sign that reads “Trail End, No ORV Use Beyond This Point, Stay On Trails Or Lose Your Permit”
- The terminus of the trail will allow for vehicles to turn around.
- Other informational signage may be included depending on the situation.
- Places on trails leading to private property, after consultation with landowners. These signs will say “Authorized Use Only”, rather than mentioning that there is private property.

An Example of a trail end marker

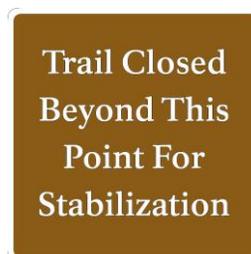


“No Trail” Markers Will Be:

- Placed in areas that have a high level of use off from the designated trails. This use may be from administrative access or from ~~inappropriate~~ unauthorized recreational uses.
- Used to prevent continued use of a track that was created through administrative use or ~~inappropriate~~ unauthorized recreational uses.
- Red carsonite posts either set in the ground or affixed to a galvanized post. This will be determined by what level of use the track receives.
- Allow for the application of 3” wide decals with “No Trail” and international symbols with a red slash indicating that the trail should not be used.
- Removed once vegetation re-grows and use of the trail subsides.

Informational Signage Will Be:

- Used to –
 - Warn trail users of hazards along the trail.
[Note: It is the subcommittee’s hope that these signs will be limited and will not, for example, be used to indicate uneven surfaces and deep holes (as indicated below), and these conditions are normal within the preserve. Alerting ORV users to some and not others might, in fact, increase danger by building reliance on signs.]
 - Indicate the distance and direction to destinations.
 - Provide regulatory and resource information.
- Small versions of typical road signs and in the same fashion of road signs. The size of these signs should be no more than 1’ x 1’.
[Note: The subcommittee is concerned about having an aesthetic that closely resembles residential or settled areas, as opposed to an aesthetic appropriate for the woods.]
- Examples would include-
 - ~~“Seasonal closure”~~
 - ~~“Uneven surface”~~
 - ~~“Deep Hole”~~
 - ~~“Stay On Trail”~~



- “No ORV Access Beyond This Point”

Examples of Informational Signs, right.

- Directional signs, identifying trail names will be placed at intersections with other trails.

General Considerations

For trails that cross large, open areas ~~such as prairies~~ and which are heavily used, it may be necessary to place markers more frequently and apply reflective tape or stickers that make the trail markers visible at night or in inclement weather.

Intersections with public roads will be marked 100 feet before the intersection with a reflective warning device and stop sign at the intersection or trail head. In the area of 11-mile Road and oil pads, signage will consist of stop signs, decals for GPS coordinates, prohibition against travel on 11-mile Road, ~~and direction and distance to U.S. 41.~~

[Note: Indicating direction and distance to Tamiami Trail in locations where ORV trails cross the 11-Mile Road may encourage unauthorized ORV use on the restricted road to expedite return to the highway.]

Trail intersections will be marked with a sign mounted on a rigid post. The sign will identify the trails and have arrows indicating the trail routes.

Yellow trail markers will be used to indicate a hazard area. These markers will be placed on both sides of the trail and will inform the user of the impending hazard type. ~~An example would be the marking of a cypress slough which remains wet through all seasons.~~

[Note: The subcommittee strongly feels that the above is a good example of over-marking. The subcommittee recommends against this level of danger marker, with the possible exception of dangers on the level of the 10+ foot deep hole blown by dynamite.]

Trail Marking Plans

A trail marking plan shall be provided to all volunteers and staff that are assigned trail marking responsibilities. The trail marking plan shall include:

- A map (1" = 1 mile minimum scale) that clearly shows the trail(s) that have legal public right-of-way and are in need of marking.
- Points on the map showing locations of where trail markers need to be placed and the type of markers needed at these points. If GPS locations are known, they shall be noted on the map.

[Note: Final placement of signs should be based upon site specific conditions rather than strict adherence to points on a map, with the goal of minimizing signage where possible.]

- Written recommendations for placement of markers along the route to address specific conditions; i.e., blind corners or sharp turns, wet crossings, hazards (such as deep holes), private land, distance markers and GPS locations markers, taking into consideration visibility during high water and/or night driving conditions.

[Note: The subcommittee agrees with the concept of written instructions for staff or volunteers, but not with having these hazard signs. We feel that this can be covered through the mandatory course and by having a general disclaimer at each kiosk.]

- Written recommendations on how to physically place the signs, i.e.; how far off the trail and at what height when placing on trees. This is important for purposes of maintaining the trail. If markers are too close, they may be run down by users or maintenance equipment performing trail work.

1. GPS coordinates on signs should be in latitude/longitude units, since most people are familiar with this system, and it is the one used by rescue and law enforcement personnel.
2. GPS coordinates, but not elevations, will be placed on all primary trail markers.
3. Trail numbers should be on markers in addition to trail names.
4. Trail marker colors for primary and secondary trails should match map colors.
5. Trail blazes may be nailed to trees with aluminum nails; however, cypress trees should be used when available.